

Hendon clinch 'Battle of the Giants'

WANDERERS ARE SHATTERED BY BAKER'S GEM!

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By STUART EARP: Hendon 2, Wycombe Wanderers 1

JUST when it seemed Wycombe Wanderers had done enough to take away a vital point from Claremont Road on Tuesday night, Johnny Baker, Hendon's talented forward, struck with a brilliant individual goal to send the Blues home pointless.

Baker's goal, a superb effort from 20 yards, extended Hendon's lead at the top to 41 points and with Dulwich winning as well, Wanderers have a big task on their hands if they are to keep in touch with the leaders.

Tuesday's game, worth six points to either side, was a match of two halves. Hendon dominated the first, looking a class side, full of running and skills with 11 individuals combining brilliantly at times. They were a goal up after 45 minutes through Bobby Childs.

Then the situation changed dramatically. Wanderers got hold of themselves and fought back with real enthusiasm. Increasing their pace and workrate, they had the champions distinctly rattled and it was only justice when Tony Horseman put them on level terms.

NOTHING TO SHOW

The 1-1 scoreline would have just about been right and looked like staying that way until Baker combined with Childs, turned superbly and pinged home a left foot shot in-off the crossbar. It was a telling blow for Wycombe to take, for they had worked so hard and ended up with nothing to show for it.

But make no mistake about it. This Hendon side are odds-on again for the title. With so many players of real class they can't really fail, unless something drastic happens. Even without England veteran John Swannell in goal, their defence looked sound although an injury to Alan Phillips in the second half brought a few jitters.

In midfield they have three of the most creative players in amateur soccer. Bobby Childs, the set piece specialist; Rod Haider another experienced international; and Derek Baker, nippy, aggressive and full of running.

Upfront, of course, there is Baker, Karon Somers and Phil Fry. The talent here is so abundant that even Roger Connell, the man who scored the winning goal in last season's Amateur Cup final at Wembley, can't get into the side. Somers is possibly the best target man around, while Baker's balanced running and speed makes him one of the league's most dangerous

When these players combine, the effect is shattering — as lowly Clapton found out to their cost the other day, 7-0. Their football is similar to Wycombe's, only faster. In the first half their passing and running was brilliant, players were darting everywhere and giving the Blues defence a severe test.

The first chance of the match fell to Wycombe, however, in the first minute. Keith Searle, who had a short stay at Claremont Road last term, flashed a header wide of the target from Roger Grant's flag kick. Hendon weren't on the defensive for long and seconds later Somers leapt high to head down Baker's cross only for Childs to screw the ball wide.

In the 13th minute Childs caught the Wycombe defence flat footed with a quick throw in. Baker ran on and slammed in a shot which struck Maskell and went for a corner. Then Somers wasted the best chance yet when Baker sprinted down the flank and crossed into the box. Somers, left unattended, volleyed just wide.

At this stage Hendon were playing with real confidence — the sort of confidence that comes when players have been together for two or three years. Passes were clipped nonchalantly into open spaces and invariably found the target. Full backs Jennings and Hand were frequently racing forward to join the attack. One such move ended with Hand slamming the ball into the side netting after combining on the wing and cutting inside.

In comparison, Wycombe's raids looked slow but they disputed everything in midfield, and after a nervous start, began to settle down well. However, it appeared the only way they would be able to break through would be something distinctly out of the ordinary, possibly from Searle, their outstanding forward.

SUPERB GOAL

Just when it seemed they had weathered the first half storm, Hendon broke through with a superb goal. Derek Baker sent Childs racing through a square defence. He pushed the ball wide of Wood and used his extra pace to run on and bend a dipping shot past Maskell.

So there it was. Forty-five minutes of fine football from Hendon with Wanderers hanging on desperately. The prospects at the interval looked gloomy for the visitors, but it was here they showed their true character, fighting back with everyone giving more than 100 per cent.

The first ten minutes of the half were even, until Searle burst onto the scene powering a header just wide from Holifield's corner. It was a great effort from Searle, who worked harder than anyone for the breakthrough. On this showing his call up to the England squad recently was long overdue.

Wycombe, as the half progressed, were looking a much improved side. Their constant pressing broke up many of the Hendon raids and home passes began to go astray. Searle was

getting the better of the struggling Phillips and put in one glorious run, sweeping past the centre half and curling in a cross on the left foot. Unfortunately, no one was there to knock it home.

Steve Perrin, who looked slow in comparison with the Hendon front runners, was set to make it 1-1 midway through the half when well placed, but he was just about to shoot when Hand brought him down just outside the area. Horseman's cleverly flighted free kick had 'keeper Paisley struggling and he just managed to tip the ball over the top for a corner.

Then, in the 68th minute, Wycombe scored the goal they thoroughly deserved for all their pressure. Childs cleared from the Hendon by-line, but only as far as Phil Wood, who pumped the ball back into the box. Tony Horseman, finding a rare bit of room in which to manoeuvre, made the most of it by bringing the ball down and lashing it high into the net over Paisley.

It was quite an unusual experience for Hendon, who had not conceded a goal in their last six matches and only three in their last 14. Only five players had found the Hendon net prior to this game in 18 league matches — quite a record.

Their retort to the Wycombe equaliser was instant and only Maskell's legs prevented them from regaining the lead immediately. Baker found space inside the Wycombe box but his shot struck the 'keeper's legs and went over the top for a corner.

Wanderers, however, were not content with the one point and were soon pressing for a second goal and three points. Pritchard and Williams worked like Trojans in midfield, disrupting the Hendon machine and setting up attacks for the front runners.

Once Pritchard raced through into a scoring position but was brought down inside the area by Jennings's flying tackle. Referee P. Taylor waved aside penalty appeals.

SHATTERING

Then, just as Wanderers looked like taking at least one point from the champions, Baker produced his shot out of the blue which left Maskell stranded. It was a shattering blow for the Blues to take but it clearly demonstrated why Hendon are on top of the league. Any one of half a dozen individuals could have swung the game in Baker's style.

Paul Birdseye came on for Grant with seven minutes remaining — too little time for Wycombe to pick themselves up off the floor again. Williams sent one drive narrowly over the top but by then, the Hendon crowd, for once overshadowing the Wycombe contingent, were already celebrating victory.

HENDON: A. Paisley; T. Jennings, P. Deadman, A. Phillips, G. Hand, R. Haider, D. Baker, R. Childs; J. Baker, K. Somers, P. Fry. Sub. R. Connell (not used).

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; D. Gamblin, P. Wood, D. Bullock, R. Grant (sub. P. Birdseye 83 mins.); R. Williams, L. Pritchard, M. Holifield; A. Horseman, K. Searle, S. Perrin.

Referee: P. Taylor.

Half time: 1-0. **Goalscorers:** Hendon — Childs (42), Baker (81); Wycombe — Horseman (68).